

Mindfulness

Living Through Challenges and
Enriching Your Life In This Moment



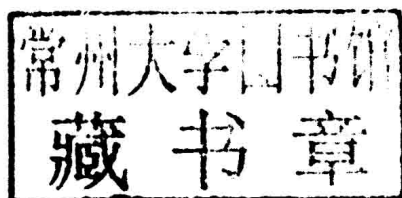
Richard W. Sears

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Mindfulness

*Living through Challenges and
Enriching Your Life in This Moment*

Richard W. Sears



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Praise for *Mindfulness: Living through Challenges and Enriching Your Life in This Moment*

“Mindfulness is a powerful tool for healing and growth. While timeless in its application, the medical community has only recently been captivated by the research demonstrating its beneficial effects. We have seen the work of Dr. Sears transform the lives of our patients, and are very pleased to see this type of information now become more widely available. Dr. Sears provides both inspiration and practical suggestions for dealing with serious challenges and for living a more fulfilling life.”

Steve Amoils, MD, and Sandi Amoils, MD, co-medical directors of the Alliance Institute for Integrative Medicine, Cincinnati, Ohio, co-authors of *Get Well & Stay Well: Optimal Health through Transformational Medicine*

“Thank you Dr. Sears for a clear, concise, practical guide for weaving mindfulness seamlessly into your everyday life! Mindfulness is a simple concept but complex to describe and apply. Dr. Sears, a knowledgeable expert, guides by example with thoughtful and poignant stories from his personal and professional life in his new book, *Mindfulness: Living through Challenges and Enriching Your Life in This Moment*.”

Susan Albers, PsyD, psychologist and author of *Eating Mindfully*

“This book is a practical guide to developing a better understanding of mindfulness and will be useful for anyone interested in discovering how this practice can help us lead wiser lives. Dr. Sears has written about mindfulness in a way that clearly shows how relevant this practice is for exploring and engaging in the joys and challenges of everyday life.”

Susan L. Woods, MSW, LICSW, MBSR/MBCT Professional Educator and Mindfulness Meditation Teacher

“*Mindfulness: Living through Challenges and Enriching Your Life in This Moment* is a wonderful new book contributing an essential and most needed fresh new context for dealing with life’s challenges, even when things go terribly wrong. It provides the reader with excellent tools and new scientific pathways, with cutting-edge neuroscience and mindfulness training. It is a wonderful, enriching guidebook for charting how to build the necessary new muscles for bringing an evenness to one’s mind, self, relationships, and life.”

Ronald A. Alexander, PhD, author of *Wise Mind, Open Mind*, Executive Director of the OpenMind Training Institute in Santa Monica, CA

“In a world where mindfulness teachings are now plentiful, Dr. Richard Sears offers a fresh perspective that is sure to interest and enliven you. Dr. Sears integrates a wide range of engaging personal and professional stories, mindfulness practices, and kernels of wisdom that have the potential to transform your practice and leave you with a deeper understanding and appreciation of yourself and others.”

Ryan M. Niemiec, PsyD, author of *Mindfulness and Character Strengths: A Practical Guide to Flourishing*, Education Director of the VIA Institute on Character

“This is a clear, insightful book, showing how mindfulness can help us find our way through difficulties as well as how mindfulness can enrich our lives. Dr. Sears’ experiences make the book personal and readable.”

Thomas Bien, PhD, author of *The Buddha’s Way of Happiness*

“MINDFULNESS is a tuning. Sears draws the reader into the focused space of Clear Mind – and illuminates the action-path. MINDFULNESS harmonizes one’s own being.”

Michael D. Fitzpatrick, world-renowned cellist and longtime musical collaborator with His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama

*To my daughters, Ashlyn and Caylee, my favorite
mindfulness teachers*

About the Author



Richard W. Sears, PsyD, MBA, ABPP, DMin, is a board-certified clinical psychologist, speaker, and consultant. He is a core faculty member of the PsyD Program in Clinical Psychology at Union Institute & University, where he is the Director of the Center for Clinical Mindfulness & Meditation. He is also Volunteer Associate Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Neurosciences at the UC College of Medicine, Clinical Assistant Professor at Wright State University School of Professional Psychology, and clinical/research faculty at the University of Cincinnati Center for Integrative Health and Wellness. He runs a private psychology practice in Cincinnati and conducts mindfulness groups

at the Alliance Institute for Integrative Medicine. He is a psychologist contractor with the Cincinnati VA Medical Center, and is also working with the UC Center for Integrative Health and Wellness and Cincinnati Children's Hospital on projects involving mindfulness.

Dr. Sears is author of *Mindfulness in Clinical Practice* (with Dennis Tirsch and Robert Denton), *Consultation Skills for Mental Health Professionals* (with John Rudisill and Carrie Mason-Sears), and *Building Competence in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy: Transcripts and Insights for Working With Stress, Anxiety, Depression, and Other Problems*, and *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for PTSD* (with Kathleen Chard). He is editor of the book *Perspectives on Spirituality and Religion in Psychotherapy* (with Alison Niblick).

Dr. Sears is a fifth degree black belt in To-Shin Do/Ninjutsu, a licensed private pilot, and received past certification as an Emergency Medical Technician. He once served briefly as a personal protection agent for the Dalai Lama of Tibet with his teacher, Stephen Kinryu-Jien Hayes. He has studied and practiced mindfulness and the Eastern Wisdom traditions over 30 years, and was given a doctorate in Buddhist Studies from Buddha Dharma University. He received ordination in the Japanese Tendai lineage, Bodhisattva ordination and authority to teach *kōans* (*inka*) under Paul Wonji Lynch in the Zen lineage of Seung Sahn, and ordination in the Vietnamese Zen tradition of Thich Thien An under Suhita Dharma.

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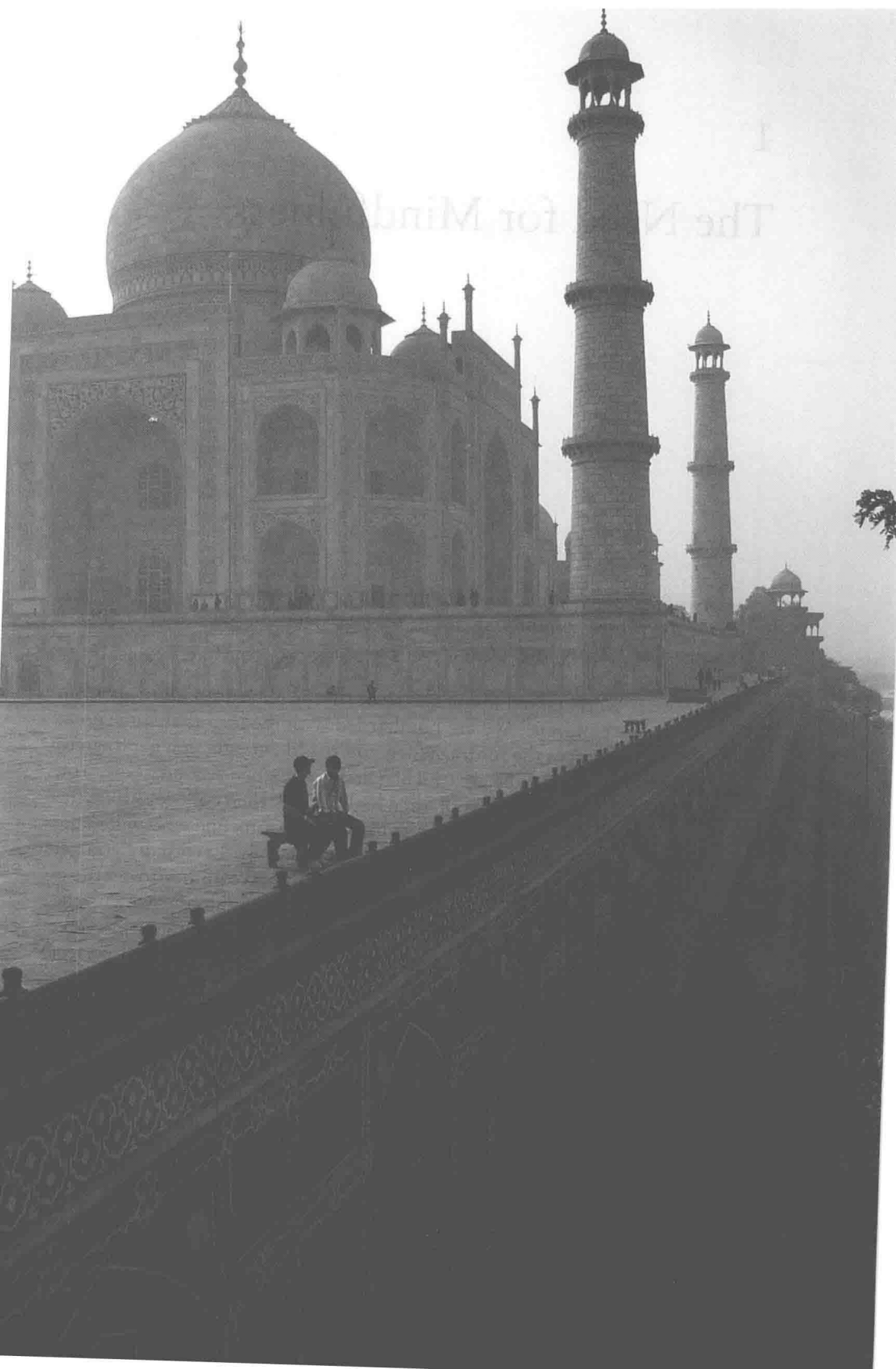
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I am grateful to all the individuals in my private practice and mindfulness groups, who have taught me so much. I present many of their stories in these pages, though the names and details have been changed to protect their privacy.

I apologize in advance for any omissions of credit. Many of my mentors had such a profound influence on me that I may have internalized some of what I've learned and forgotten from where I've learned it.

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1

The Need for Mindfulness

Many of us have become so entrenched in getting things done, worrying about the future, ruminating about the past, and making comparisons that we don't spend much time in this moment.

The late Alan Watts talked about the trick that is played on all of us from the time we are children.¹ We are bombarded with the idea that some great thing will be coming in the future. When you're old enough, you get to go to kindergarten – won't that be great? Then first grade, then second grade. You can look forward to middle school, then high school, then college! Along the way, you long for the day you will meet that special someone who will make your life feel more complete, and perhaps start a family. Eventually you get to enter the world of work, where you can make and save money to get those things you've always wanted to make you happy. You fight your way up the ladder, believing that things will be so much better after you get that next promotion. And once you get that nice house and reliable car and perfect partner, life will be so much easier. Finally your kids grow up and get lives of their own. When you get to retirement, too tired to enjoy it from the stress of working so hard all those years, you realize that your life is almost over, and you were absent from most of it. As the saying goes, life is what happened to you while you were busy making other plans.

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Richard W. Sears.

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If we don't have much practice living in the moment we are in, how can we expect to enjoy that future we long for when it finally does arrive? Have you ever achieved a long sought-after goal, only to have the joy wear off after a few days, quickly setting your sights on your next future goal? If we are in the habit of always thinking of the next thing, we lose the skill of truly appreciating the present moment.

When we were young kids, the summers seemed to last forever, but as we grow older, time seems to slip away from us. The amount of time each of us has each day is the same as it has always been, but why does it feel like it moves so quickly? Why don't we have more time with all of the amazing technological advances we've made? With email and texting, I can now communicate with others instantly, anytime, anywhere. No longer do I have to write out a letter, walk to the post office, buy a stamp, and mail it. With instant access to databases on my computer and my phone, no longer do I have to spend hours researching information in a library on how to repair something in my house. With microwave ovens, I can cook my food in less time than it takes me to eat it.

How is it that our ancestors were able to sit on the porch every evening, watching the sunset, when they had to do things like prepare all their meals from scratch and wash their clothes by hand? Why does it feel like we seldom get a break from all the problems in our lives? Is it even possible to be more present, with all of our responsibilities, in the midst of all this modern chaos?

For many of us, it seems there is always "one more thing" to deal with, another problem to tackle, and we are waiting for things to calm down so we can start to live. Sometimes years can go by, and instead of the problems going away, they gradually wear us down, mentally and physically. It is difficult to accept that suffering is a natural part of life, and that how we relate to suffering makes all the difference. We get caught in vicious circles. We get stressed out that we are so stressed. We become anxious about our anxiety. We get scared of how afraid we feel. We feel depressed that we are so depressed all the time. We get angry about our anger. We hurt so much from our pain. We feel guilty about feeling so much guilt. We become addicted to our addictions. We are impatient with our impatience. We feel irritated about our irritability. We judge how judgmental we are. We rarely give ourselves permission to feel what we are truly feeling.

Though traumatic childhoods are all too common, most of us can remember how much easier it was to fully engage in our activities and relationships when we were younger. When we hurt, we cried and let it out, and usually felt better quickly. When we were happy, we could laugh from the very depths of our being. We explored with curiosity all the wonders in the world around us.

My preschooler notices the most ordinary things around her with amazement, things that most adults take for granted. My teenager, however,



Kids enjoying the beach. © Richard Sears.

has become indoctrinated and hypnotized into the realm of thinking and judgments, where not having an Internet connection is worse than death, one instant message can make or ruin her day, and comparison with peers is constant. Kids are being pressured to grow up very quickly these days, and too often leave behind some of their best qualities.

Mindfulness, the ability to pay attention in the present moment, is a natural human process that we are all born with, but tends to diminish as we grow older and get caught up in the world of thoughts. While thinking is important, when our lives are spent anticipating the future, or living in the past, we miss the richness of the moment we are in now. Fostering mindfulness allows us to more consciously participate in our lives, breaking us out of the mindless routines we often fall into automatically. When facing challenges, we can learn to step out of old habits that make the situation worse, consciously responding rather than unconsciously reacting. We can allow our emotions to rise and fall without getting as stuck in them. We can also choose to notice more often the beauty in the world around us, to appreciate the sound of good music, and to savor the connection we feel when we look into the eyes of those we love.

Although an ancient practice in many cultures, mindfulness is supported by hundreds of modern research studies that demonstrate amazing benefits